

MRS. WILLIAM C. WHITNEY, THE NEW QUEEN OF NEW YORK SOCIETY.

With Millions at Her Command, a Magnificent Town House and Country Seat, with Her Tact and Rare Personal Charm and with William C. Whitney's High Position Behind Her, She Will Lead the "Four Hundred."

Who shall be the queen of New York society—not the head of a narrow, ultra-exclusive clique, but the acknowledged ruler of the whole fashionable society of the most wealthy and luxurious metropolis in the world?

There is no such potentate just now, but there is a claimant—to use the word in its most dignified sense—in the field, with great possibilities of success. She is the beautiful and fascinating Mrs. William Collins Whitney, the newly married wife of the man who combines political, social and financial ability more equally than any of his contemporaries.

That there is a chance for a woman to become a sovereign of society is not to be doubted. It is only a question of ability and good fortune. Several have come near the supreme dignity, but have just failed. They have been held back as they were grasping the sceptre. Mrs. Paron Stevens was a dictator, but not a sovereign, for Mrs. Astor had more dignity, if less power.

Society needs an autocrat. No one, friend or critic, will pretend that it is democratic. At the same time, it will not submit to a monarchy of the old-fashioned sort. It needs a Napoleonic rather than a Bourbon dynasty. Neither Knickerbocker ancestry nor great wealth alone suffices to secure the leadership.

Mrs. Whitney is about to start her contest for the throne. She would have done so already but for an unhappy event in her husband's family. The opening of the campaign will not be long delayed, and meanwhile it is interesting to calculate the resources and advantages which the fair and intrepid leader will enjoy.

In the first place, she will have the advantage of the lack of rivals belonging to the richest families in the country. If any member of the Astor or Vanderbilt families were in the contest she would be a dangerous rival. Other things being equal, enormous wealth would no doubt carry the day. But, owing to domestic misfortune and other circumstances, the Astors and Vanderbilts are not in the running.

Mrs. Astor, who once held a predominant position in society, has been forced into retirement by advancing years and the recent death of her daughter, Mrs. Roosevelt. Her daughter-in-law, Mrs. John Jacob Astor, has recently lost a child, and does not care much to be a leader of society.

William Waldorf Astor, the possessor of the bulk of the Astor millions, is a widower, and if he marries again he will still bask in the sunshine of the British aristocracy. America is too coarse and vulgar a place for him, and his wealth is not likely to be spent in an effort to lead New York society.

The Vanderbilts are removed from the contest for various reasons. The death of Mrs. William H. Vanderbilt would alone be sufficient to send them into retirement for this season, but this retirement is likely to be permanent. A few years ago Mr. and Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt were seeking social distinction with much energy, but a series of misfortunes has deprived them of the spirit necessary for this pursuit. The death of his eldest son, the divorce of his brother, the marriage of his eldest surviving son against his will, his own serious illness and the death of his mother have almost broken Cornelius Vanderbilt.

The collapse of Mrs. Oliver H. P. Belmont's bold campaign for the leadership is a matter of recent history. As Mrs. Alva Vanderbilt and the mother of the prospective Duchess of Marlborough she held a powerful position. But when in great haste she married the divorced Mr. O. H. P. Belmont and tried to rule society she was quite coldly dropped last Summer. She had no longer a duke in her house to attract people, and they stayed away.

Mrs. Ogden Mills, a descendant of the Livingstons, is a leader of a set-of that very rigid and haughty set, the One Hundred and Fifty. She is acknowledged leader by the Twenty, the inner circle which controls the One Hundred and Fifty. But she has neither the desire nor the ability to rule society at large, which includes the Four Hundred and all who claim acquaintance with it.

So the new Mrs. William C. Whitney becomes the most important candidate for the vacant throne. In order to set forth clearly her chances of success in this exciting struggle, her resources shall be considered under the following heads:

1. Her personal qualities.
2. Her husband's personal qualities.
3. Their possessions.
4. Their family connections.

Until her recent marriage, which took place at Bar Harbor in September, Mrs. Whitney was Mrs. Edith Randolph. She had originally dawned on society as one of "the handsome May girls." Her father was Dr. William May, a well-known physician and a native of Baltimore, who came to New York at the close of the war. He enjoyed historic fame as the man who identified the body of Wilkes Booth, the assassin of President Lincoln.

His son and his daughters were all active in society. The girls were brilliantly handsome. One of them, Carrie, married William Wright, and another sister, Alice, became Mrs. J. Beaver Webb. Their mother was Miss Mills, and they are related to the Ogden Mills.

Edith May, the present Mrs. Whitney, was educated in Germany. There, at the age of nineteen, she met Captain Arthur Randolph, an officer in an English hussar regiment, who fell deeply in love with her. He followed her to this country, where they were married. He resigned his commission and they led a cosmopolitan life. Two children were born to them, the older of whom is now sixteen. Captain Randolph died in Canada of heart disease nine years ago.

During her widowhood Mrs. Randolph lived at No. 127 East Fortieth street in a charming little apartment, which was a centre of attraction to many of the most prominent people in society, including the Whitneys, Belmonts and others of that stamp. The late Mrs. Whitney and Mrs. Randolph were great friends.

The present Mrs. Whitney is strikingly handsome. She has dark-brown hair and a deep, rich coloring. Her figure is matronly, but graceful, and her regular features have a strong expression of vivacity, good nature and courage. Her personal appearance is thoroughly in keeping with her well-known strength of character, which will undoubtedly carry her far in her present social race.

Although she has always been in the most fashionable society, Mrs. Whitney has never been snobbish nor fearful of making friends outside the

sacred circles. She has been a good friend to many young and clever people of humble origin. She has long been an energetic and useful member of St. George's Church, Stuyvesant square, of which the Rev. W. S. Rainsford is rector, and which does much work among the East Side poor. Mrs. Randolph conducted a sewing class at this church and did much to help young girls.

Of the life of William Collins Whitney, her distinguished husband, it is less necessary to go into details, for those who know nothing about society know something about him. Mr. Whitney was born in 1841, and is of New England ancestry. He is a graduate of Yale College and the Harvard Law School.

He began his career as a lawyer in New York and went into politics as a Democrat. He was a member of the County Democracy, and helped to organize the Irving Hall movement, and gained the friendship of Samuel J. Tilden. In 1875 he was appointed Corporation Counsel, and discharged his duties so well that he saved the city three or four million dollars.

In 1895 he became Secretary of the Navy in Cleveland's Administration. During his tenure of that office he laid the foundations of the present navy, of which this country is justly proud. When he took office there was no navy, and when he left there was a respectable one. It is this achievement which is his highest claim to the regard of the American people. Since then he has figured as a Presidential possibility, and has taken an important part in the counsels of his party.

Early in life he married Miss Flora Payne, daughter of Henry R. Payne, and sister of Oliver H. Payne, one of the powers of the Standard Oil Company. They had several children, who are spoken of hereafter.

It is understood to be Mr. Whitney's ambition to become the richest man in America. His present fortune is estimated at \$10,000,000. His relations with the Paynes and Vanderbilts give him all the advantages that a man could desire in this way, and he relies on his own ability to do the rest. He is the head in this city of the Metropolitan Traction Company, which owns the Broadway railroad, and is seeking to control all the street railroads in America. His business activity is ceaseless and endless.

But neither wealth nor political distinction is sufficient for Mr. Whitney. He made up his mind to be in society in the most complete sense of the word, and he has achieved his ambition. He has friends in the most fashionable society, among the practical politicians and among the horny-handed sons of toil. Nothing human is foreign to him. He is one of the few men in this country who could gain such universal popularity. It is considered a remarkable proof of his personal powers that he could be successful in politics while he was so closely connected with the Standard Oil Company.

As an illustration of his boldness, it may be mentioned that he invited Richard Croker to his house to meet fashionable persons who had expressed the utmost contempt for that eminently practical politician.

Chief among the possessions of Mr. and Mrs. William C. Whitney, after the cash, is the house at Fifty-seventh street and Fifth avenue—a splendid mansion, which must fulfil the desire of any woman's heart as a place of entertainment. It is in the best part of New York, and of the few houses in the city that exceed it in size the majority offend against good taste. The white and gold ball room is perhaps the finest in town.

The Whitneys will eventually be in possession of a magnificent country estate among the Wheatley Hills on Long Island. With the energy and individuality that characterize him, Mr. Whitney is having this immense place laid out according to his own ideas.

The estate includes between 700 and 800 acres of land, and is one of the largest in the neighborhood of New York. Olmstead, Elliott and Olmstead, the landscape gardeners, have been at work on it for some time. About 250 acres are already covered with fine trees, and much of the rest is of great natural beauty.

Among those who are bound by family ties to support Mrs. Whitney are the Vanderbilts, for her husband's eldest son, Harry Payne Whitney, is married to the daughter of Cornelius Vanderbilt. Mr. Whitney's daughter, Pauline, married Mr. Americus Hugh Paget, son of Lord Alfred Paget. His family, at the head of which is the Marquis of Anglesey, is one of the proudest and most ancient in the British aristocracy.

As Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney is the first cousin of the Duchess of Marlborough, the connection of the Whitneys with the peerage is such as to command the respectful admiration of high American society. In any case these alliances give an ornamental finish to a structure which is built on very substantial foundations.

Mrs. Whitney is a cousin of Mrs. William Jay and of Mrs. Hermann Oelrichs. Her brother, Fred May, once a leader of the liveliest men about town, was the hero of a duel many years ago. He left this country for South America after he had nearly killed a very big New York policeman. He showed his pluck in a better way when he helped the sailors of the Baltimore during the murderous attack made on them in Valparaiso. Recently he returned to these shores and was present at his sister's wedding. He is again one of the familiar figures about town, but is not so gay as formerly.

